



Customer Service Strategy, Charter and Plan 2024 - 2027



What is Customer Service?

Good customer service is about meeting or exceeding customer expectations by providing a positive, helpful experience at every interaction. Delivering it requires:

- Responsive and timely service delivery based on customer input.
- Knowledgeable and competent employees with a friendly, helpful attitude.
- Being proactive in predicting and meeting needs before being asked wherever possible
- Monitoring performance and satisfaction to continually improve and to fix things if they go wrong.

Citizens have a key part to play working with the council to meet their needs, for example by providing the correct information to allow their needs to be assessed.

Why is it so important?

Good customer service matters, as it shows citizens their taxes are being well spent and it saves money and reduces inefficiency arising from unnecessary rework and complaints.

It ensures people and businesses have good, equitable access to the high quality services that they need.

This in turn increases customer satisfaction and boosts staff morale and motivation to deliver high standards.



The Council's website had over
4 million
web page views
last year and
86% satisfaction
rating.



The Contact Centre logged
597,000
service/info requests
in 2022/23 and only 689
(0.001%) of them were
complaints.



The Council handled
461,801 inbound
telephone calls
in 2022/23.



75% of all
customer interactions
in 2022/23 were via 24/7
digital self-service.

Why do we need a Customer Service Strategy?

Embedding good customer service standards in an organisation takes constant effort and investment. For this reason the council's Constitution requires the regular production of an up to date **Customer Service Strategy** that shows the principles and priorities that will guide service delivery, along with an Action Plan of activities that will help ensure the Strategy is delivered. There is also a **Customer Service Charter** that sets out the mutual council and customer expectations and responsibilities if good customer service is to be achieved.

How customers shape our new strategy

We sought customer input to the strategy through both an online survey and by providing the opportunity to complete paper surveys for hard to reach customers. We also asked all of our employees for input as they will deliver the customer care and Charter pledges. 276 feedback responses were received with 996 individual comments that were distilled into 87 actionable notes, used to finalise the Strategy below.



The Customer Service Strategy 2024 - 2027

OUR MISSION – To engage effectively with colleagues, citizens and businesses to deliver services that work, using professionalism, customer focus and technology.

OUR COMMITMENT – To provide high quality customer care in a fair and respectful manner, using customer centred engagement and accessible technology.

Core to the success of the council's vision for a vibrant Argyll and Bute is how the council interacts with all of its customers to realise shared aspirations. That means the council working to meet their needs as efficiently and effectively as possible, with customers playing their part in enabling the council to do that.

This **Customer Service Strategy** sums up the main principles and priorities that will shape our future customer service delivery. There is a linked **Customer Service Action Plan** that details the things we will do to ensure delivery of the principles.

There are 6 Principles and each of these has a range of priorities covering specific areas of focus. We have summarised these graphically below:

	PRIORITY	PROVIDES	KEY AREAS OF FOCUS
 BE FAIR AND INCLUSIVE	To provide a welcoming, helpful and inclusive service that treats customers as fairly and respectfully as we wish our employees to be treated.	The requirement to meet all equality obligations when providing for the diversity and location of customers.	Digital inclusion and support Web accessibility Inclusive choice of how to contact your council Support the hard to reach Educating our people Islands awareness
 COLLABORATE WITH YOU	Working together to make a difference.	The opportunity to build services with and not for customers, so they meet needs and give support.	Person specific services Customer consultation Customer engagement Feedback mechanisms Benchmarking Service design Partnership working
 BE RESPONSIVE AND OPEN	To provide information and services based on needs, preferences and transparency.	A culture of openness and accountability where we provide proactive and discreet information appropriately.	Deliver appropriate services to communities, groups and individuals Proactive and timely information and services Responsive service standards 24/7 on demand information and services Person to person customer contact
 PROVIDE DIGITAL CONVENIENCE	To provide convenient and usable digital solutions that enhance customer care efficiency.	The drive to update digital engagement platforms for positive user experiences, while reducing costs and our carbon footprint.	Providing a range of digital engagement channels Use of automation to join up service delivery and give 24/7 citizen support Using national digital solutions when appropriate Resilient systems and effective emergency plans
 PROTECT YOUR PRIVACY AND DATA	Ensure we comply with relevant data and privacy regulations and standards.	The opportunity to build citizen confidence in using digital services by building trust in our secure and ethical handling of data.	Building data protection compliance into system and service design Robust data management to safeguard confidentiality and personal information Employee data protection and cybersecurity training Cybersecurity resilience Supplier conformance
 DELIVER HIGH STANDARDS	To achieve high standards; e.g. in service quality and timeliness, that maximises customer satisfaction and minimises rework.	For co-operative working with customers and businesses so each play their part in delivering excellent outcomes and high levels of satisfaction.	Employee customer care and system training Take action to remove errors and maximise rework Effective performance data, insights, checks and analysis Empowering employees Predictive/proactive delivery Fixing things that go wrong

Customer Service Strategy – Context

The six principles within this Strategy align with a number of other key Council and Scottish Government policies and strategies, including:

- The Council Corporate Plan
- The Council ICT & Digital Strategy
- The Council Data Strategy
- The Council Communication Strategy
- The Council People Strategy
- The Scottish Government Digital Strategy



Connect For Success is the council's Improvement Strategy and the Customer Service Strategy builds on that by:

“Connecting people through technology, using customer insight to do more of what works and changing what doesn’t”.

Customer Service Charter

Our commitment is to provide high quality customer care in a fair and respectful manner, using customer centred engagement and accessible technology. We ask our customers to play their part in helping us to do that and together we can deliver effective services. This Customer Service Charter outlines the commitments needed from the council and its customers if we are jointly to achieve that aspiration.

1.	We will provide a responsive service to requests and enquiries, seeking to minimise bureaucracy and telling customers our timescales based on the complexity of the service being provided. We need our customers to provide information and evidences requested.
2.	Mutual respect and fair treatment will be the basis of council and customer engagement. Council employees will be polite, helpful, honest and professional when supporting customers and we ask that customers treat them in the same way. We are one community.
3.	We commit to giving customers a wide and inclusive range of ways to contact and engage with us for their convenience and preference, including person to person and with 24/7 digital assistance. We ask our customers to use self-service where possible.
4.	We will deliver information and services in an open and transparent way, from providing clear and accessible information about what we can deliver and any fees, to proactively telling customers when there may be issues or changes. We ask customers to inform themselves wherever possible using these continually updated information resources.
5.	Safeguarding customers' privacy and keeping their personal data secure is a key priority for us and fundamental to building mutual trust. We will support customers when they wish to use their information and data protection rights.
6.	We will continually strive to improve our service based on feedback from customers and analysis of data from satisfaction surveys, engagement patterns and comparisons with other councils. We ask that customers participate with us and give us their feedback and insights in a positive and helpful way and we will inform them of the difference this has made.



Customer Service Action Plan 2024 - 2025

Customer Service Strategy Action Plan

Principle 1: We will be fair and inclusive

Actions will meet our priority:

- ▶ To provide a welcoming and inclusive service that treats customers as fairly and respectfully as we wish our employees to be treated.

Actions will provide:

- ▶ The elements to meet all equality obligations when providing for the diversity and location of our customers.

Action	Linked to which charter pledge	Owner	By when
1.1 We will review the findings of the Audit Scotland review on Digital Exclusion due in 2024 and implement relevant customer service related recommendations.	3. A wide and inclusive range of ways to contact and engage with us.	Customer Engagement Team	September 2024
1.2 We will review the current portfolio of customer service focused diversity and cultural sensitivity training for service centre and service point agents and implement revisions where required.	2. Mutual respect and fair treatment	Customer Engagement Team HROD	December 2024
1.3 We will roll out appropriate mental health/neurodivergent awareness training to all service centre and service point agents including dementia awareness and trauma awareness.	2. Mutual respect and fair treatment	Customer Engagement Team	March 2025
1.4 We will review and improve our online and mediated multi language support, including British Sign Language, benchmarking with other organisations to maximise ease of access to services.	3. A wide and inclusive range of ways to contact and engage with us.	Customer Engagement Team HROD	December 2024
1.5 We will strive consistently to reach a 98% standard of compliance with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.2 as assessed by the Silktide Index of public sector websites.	3. A wide and inclusive range of ways to contact and engage with us.	Customer Engagement Team Web Team	March 2025
1.6 We will pilot the deployment of Community Hub based Service Point resources starting with the Kilcreggan Community Hub and make any necessary changes to ensure effective wider delivery of community hubs.	3. A wide and inclusive range of ways to contact and engage with us.	Customer Engagement Team Community Planning	September 2024
1.7 We will review Customer Service delivery provision in light of new UNCRC law regarding the rights of children and make relevant changes.	2. Mutual respect and fair treatment	Customer Engagement Team Children Services	March 2025

Customer Service Strategy Action Plan

Principle 2: We will collaborate with you

Actions will meet our priority:

- ▶ *Working together to make a difference.*

Actions will provide:

- ▶ *The opportunity to build services with and not for customers, so they meet needs and provide support.*

Action	Linked to which charter pledge	Owner	By when
2.1 We will survey our customers on their post pandemic contact preferences and insights (paying particular attention to ensuring the Hard to Reach cohort of customers is adequately represented), to inform the responsive evolution of our customer engagement.	6. Continually strive to improve our service based on feedback.	Customer Engagement Team Comms Team	October 2024
2.2 We will ensure that all of our system designers and developers have completed a foundation course on the Scottish Approach to Service Design and thereafter follow its principles and techniques.	6. Continually strive to improve our service based on feedback.	Customer Engagement Team HROD	March 2025 and ongoing
2.3 We will upgrade the council's 'Keep in the Loop' service to capture subscribers' addresses and therefore permit more and improved location specific consultations and outreach activity. This will also allow us to extend the number of proactive notification services available.	1. We will provide a responsive service.	Customer Engagement Team	September 2024
2.4 We will review the corporate customer satisfaction and other feedback mechanisms, question sets and reporting of results, using customer input and make any required improvements to our approach.	6. Continually strive to improve our service based on feedback.	Customer Engagement Team HROD	December 2024
2.5 We will establish an annual corporate customer satisfaction survey of all key council services and analyse responses to identify areas for improvement. This will also augment and validate the independent Local Government Benchmarking Framework survey.	6. Continually strive to improve our service based on feedback.	HROD Comms Team	January 2025
2.6 We will collaborate with other councils through the Local Authority Customer Service Improvement Group to share best practice and resources for the benefit of our citizens.	6. Continually strive to 2.5e our service based on feedback.	Customer Engagement Team	April 2024 and ongoing

Customer Service Strategy Action Plan

Principle 3: We will be responsive and open

Actions will meet our priority:

- ▶ To provide information and services based on needs, preferences and transparency.

Actions will provide:

- ▶ A culture of openness and accountability where we provide proactive and discreet information appropriately.

Action	Linked to which charter pledge	Owner	By when
3.1 The council's Data Advisory Group (DAG) will oversee the creation of a prioritised list of new open datasets to be published on the council website, particularly with a view to reducing avoidable contact for Freedom of Information requests for this data.	4. We will deliver information and services in an open and transparent way.	Data Advisory Group Customer Engagement Team	March 2025
3.2 We will implement the recommendations of a recent customer informed review of the MyAccount personalised online service hub, to extend its functionality and further improve personalised engagement.	3. A wide and inclusive range of ways to contact and engage with us.	Customer Engagement Team	March 2025
3.3 We will explore opportunities for deploying generative and other AI to enhance customer service, particularly for informational, personalised and self-service elements.	1. We will provide a responsive service.	Customer Engagement Team ICT	March 2025
3.4 We will review the performance reporting for customer service (as part of the Performance Review Project), taking account of customer feedback and set up a dashboard of reported measures linked to the Customer Charter pledges.	4. We will deliver information and services in an open and transparent way.	HROD Customer Engagement Team	October 2024
3.5 We will upgrade and relaunch the Hub using Drupal10 technology and develop a strategy to rationalise the information and action resources available on the Hub, MyCouncilWorks and Teams Sharepoints for the benefit of all employees.	1. We will provide a responsive service.	HROD Customer Engagement Team Comms Team	December 2024
3.6 We will produce a new Annual Customer Service Performance Report detailing both qualitative and quantitative customer service performance for the previous business year.	4. We will deliver information and services in an open and transparent way.	Customer Engagement Team	May 2024
3.7 We will improve signposting to non-digital access channels for digital strugglers as part of our inclusive approach.	4. We will deliver information and services in an open and transparent way.	Customer Engagement Team Comms Team	December 2024

Customer Service Strategy Action Plan

Principle 4: We will provide digital convenience

Actions will meet our priority:

- ▶ To provide convenient and usable digital solutions that enhance customer care efficiency.

Actions will provide:

- ▶ The drive to update digital engagement platforms for positive user experiences, while reducing costs and our carbon footprint.

Action	Linked to which charter pledge	Owner	By when
4.1 We will upgrade the web site and intranet search engine to use more advanced AI based technology, which allows natural language queries.	1. We will provide a responsive service.	Customer Engagement Team	May 2024
4.2 We will implement a cloud based website hosted service that will make the council's online services more efficient to administer and provide greater resilience and faster business continuity for customers in the event of cyber-attack.	1. We will provide a responsive service.	Customer Engagement Team ICT	August 2024
4.3 We review our Display Screen Network of digital office displays and determine the most modern and appropriate solution based on customer needs.	3. A wide and inclusive range of ways to contact and engage with us.	Customer Engagement Team ICT	September 2024
4.4 We will investigate ways that the Internet of Things (IoT) revolution might enhance our customer service; for example by using the new In-Cab technology of the Route Optimisation Project to improve speed of Bin Disruption Service alerts or Missed Bin Reporting.	1. We will provide a responsive service.	Customer Engagement Team ICT	December 2024
4.5 We will use Microsoft 365 features, particularly those associated with MS Teams, to enhance customer care where possible. This includes moving the Contact Centre to a live MS Teams Telephony operation when we have tested the solution.	3. A wide and inclusive range of ways to contact and engage with us.	Customer Engagement Team ICT	March 2025
4.6 We will make significantly greater use of informational and instructional videos and animations to assist and inform customers and promote these through all our digital media.	4. We will deliver information and services in an open and transparent way.	Customer Engagement Team Comms Team	March 2025
4.7 We will audit all website forms to ensure they have an integrated eform equivalent that requires no rekeying.	1. We will provide a responsive service.	Customer Engagement Team	February 2025

Customer Service Strategy Action Plan

Principle 5: We will protect your privacy and data

Actions will meet our priority:

- ▶ To ensure we comply with relevant data and privacy regulations and standards .

Actions will provide:

- ▶ The opportunity to build citizen confidence in using digital services by building trust in our secure and ethical handling of data.

Action	Linked to which charter pledge	Owner	By when
5.1 We will evaluate the potential for using the Scottish Government's new Identity Management Service as the basis for authenticating to council service's where required. If this change is to be made, a Migration Plan from MyAccount will be developed.	5. Safeguarding customers' privacy and data security.	Customer Engagement Team Scotgov Identity Project	March 2025
5.2 We will investigate how robotic process automation can be safely deployed to make the Freedom of Information and Subject Access Request Process more efficient and speed up response times.	5. Safeguarding customers' privacy and data security.	Customer Engagement Team DP/FOI Team	December 2024
5.3 We will review every Privacy Statement and Data Protection Impact Assessment for all of the Customer Engagement Team's services and systems to ensure that they are current and comprehensive.	5. Safeguarding customers' privacy and data security.	Customer Engagement Team DP/FOI Team	March 2025
5.4 We will review the Induction, Agent and Management level training delivered to the Customer Engagement Team and ensure all employees have received new or refresher trainer privacy and data protection on a regular cycle.	5. Safeguarding customers' privacy and data security.	Customer Engagement Team HROD	December 2024
5.5 We will implement the National Records of Scotland's new Digital Registration records management protocols (known as "Calling in the Pages"), due in 2024, across all of our Registration Districts and train Registrars accordingly.	5. Safeguarding customers' privacy and data security.	Customer Engagement Team National Records of Scotland	December 2024
5.6 Our Web Team will collaborate with the Local Government Drupal web content project to share best practice and gain knowledge, particularly around data security and privacy of online services.	5. Safeguarding customers' privacy and data security.	Customer Engagement Team Local Government Drupal Project	April 2025 and ongoing

Customer Service Strategy Action Plan

Principle 6: We will deliver high standards

Actions will meet our priority:

- To achieve quality standards that maximise customer satisfaction and minimise rework.

Actions will provide:

- For co-operative working with customers and businesses so each play their part in delivering excellent outcomes and high levels of satisfaction.

Action	Linked to which charter pledge	Owner	By when
6.1 We will complete an end-to-end review of our internal Customer Service Toolkit of assistive resources and standards, to ensure it reflects both technology and Customer Service Strategy driven changes.	6. We will continually strive to improve our service.	Customer Engagement Team Comms Team	March 2025
6.2 We will review and update our approach to the measurement of "Avoidable Contact" and "Failure Demand" and the use of intelligence gained to drive continual improvement across all Services.	6. We will continually strive to improve our service.	Customer Engagement Team Data Programme	December 2024
6.3 We will ensure that the corporate Performance Framework measures the success of the Strategy and Charter.	6. We will continually strive to improve our service.	Customer Engagement Team Performance Project	January 2025
6.4 We will investigate the advantages of rebuilding our Corporate Complaints Management System on a new 'low code' platform to provide a more efficient and automated system for administering and reporting on complaints.	6. We will continually strive to improve our service.	Customer Engagement Team Governance Team	February 2025
6.5 We will expand the use of the Customer Service Excellence standard across more teams and services to help drive up Customer Service standards in a measurable and systematic way.	6. We will continually strive to improve our service.	Customer Engagement Team Services	March 2025
6.6 We will review and improve our signposting to partner and other commonly requested non-council services and improve the analytics around such requests for continual improvement.	6. We will continually strive to improve our service.	Customer Engagement Team Data Programme	December 2024
6.7 We will fully review and update our corporate customer training for employees including the Positive Customer Care and Argyll and Bute Manager Customer Care training, to ensure we train employees to deliver high standards.	6. We will continually strive to improve our service.	Customer Engagement Team HROD	March 2025

Please note that the Action Plan will evolve over time. The actions listed in the previous pages are just the starter actions for 2024 and 2025.



FURTHER INFORMATION

For further information please contact:

Robert Miller

Customer Engagement Manager

Robert.Miller@argyll-bute.gov.uk

01546 604026



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